

A Communication Link for Idaho's Conservation Districts

South-Central Idaho Conservation Districts

Upon conclusion of negotiations, DEQ intends to publish a proposed rule for public comment in the summer of 2010 and then present the final proposal to the Idaho Board of Environmental Quality for adoption of a pending rule in the fall of 2010. If adopted by the Board, the pending rule will be reviewed by the 2011 Idaho Legislature.

Blaine Soil and Water Conservation District—Bob Simpson, Chairman

The Blaine Soil and Water Conservation District (SCD) wants to extend congratulations, good bye, good luck and a great big thank you to Laurie Ellsworth. She and her family are moving to Mesa, Arizona to serve as Mission Presidents for the Mesa Arizona Spanish Speaking Mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. She has served as the Administrative Assistant for five years providing excellent service to landowners, landscapers, and gardeners. She will be missed by all of the board members, county commissioners, and partnering non-profit agencies. Laurie's last day will be around May 1st, right after the tree sale. Thank you Laurie!

Currently Blaine SCD is undergoing a transition, welcoming Erica Cook as the new Administrative Assistant. She has a degree in Horticulture and Business Management. In the past she has served the agriculture community through the University of Idaho Research and Extension Center in Idaho Falls. Erica is taking on and moving forward with current Blaine SCD projects such as: Tree Sale, supporting the Wood River Trout Friendly Lawn program in developing a community garden center in Hailey, partnering with local non-profit agencies, supporting the Blaine Land, Water, and Wildlife Levy, working with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) on Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) projects, and last but not least, implementing a soil and plant testing program.

Balanced Rock Soil Conservation District—Rick Rodgers, Chairman Snake River Soil and Water Conservation District—Matt Nail, Chairman

Tunnels and your drinking water

Since July, the Balanced Rock Soil Conservation District (SCD), along with the Snake River Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), has been exploring the relationship between water quality in irrigation drain tunnels and nearby private wells. Twin Falls County is the state's number one nitrate high priority area.

Late last summer and into the fall, water samples were collected from the 47 named drain tunnels across the Twin Falls Canal Co. tract plus approximately 70 samples from private wells. All the samples were tested for nitrates at the same laboratory in Twin Falls. Landowners were also surveyed about their crop rotations as well as nutrient management, irrigation water management and tillage practices in fields directly above the tunnels.



Nitrate levels increasing

While no direct correlation can be drawn from one year of data and reported management practices, some interesting trends were identified.

First, there is a trend toward increasing nitrate levels across the entire tract. During the winter of 1968-69, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Research Service monitored several of the major drain tunnels across the tract. When that data is compared to what the conservation districts learned in 2009, there is an upward trend. That trend is more pronounced west of Filer.

For example, the Claar Tunnel -- east of Twin Falls -- had a nitrate level of 5.37 mg/L in 2009, up from 4.02 mg/L in 1968-69. Other tunnels east of Filer showed the same trend.

But west of Filer, the increases were larger. The Peavey Tunnel showed an increase from 3.02 mg/L in 1968-69 to 5.52 mg/L last year. The Dolana Tunnel, near Deep Creek, was 10.2 mg/L last fall up from 3.0 mg/L previously. A tunnel along Highway 30 west of Buhl had the highest level last year at 13.5 mg/L. ARS had not monitored that tunnel previously.

All the private well samples east of Filer were below 5 mg/L of nitrates. Overall, 37 private wells measured less than 5 mg/L last fall and 33 tested between 5 and 10 mg/L. None tested above 10 mg/L.

A second batch of water samples was collected in March, before the irrigation season began. These samples were tested for both phosphorus and nitrates. Indications are that nitrate levels were lower in the drain tunnels but because the winter samples were analyzed at a different laboratory, that cannot be said conclusively.

Because no direct link could be found between land practices and nitrate levels, the districts would like to continue the project. Balanced Rock SCD has applied for a second source water protection grant to continue the project for another two years. Snake River SWCD has also applied for a grant to help educate high school students about nitrates in groundwater.

North Side Soil Conservation District—John Reed, Chairman



Jerome County Commissioners Joe Davidson and Kathie Roamer discuss the North Side SWCD's new project along the north side of the Snake River at Auger Falls. The District has been asked to develop and execute a plan for the two areas in Jerome County's Snake River Canyons Park. The special tour was led by Roy Prescott, a past county commissioner, and attended by Jerome Conservation Partnership members (NRCS, ISCC, RC&D, County Commissioners, & NSSWCD).

Outreach Equals Success

The North Side Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) mixes community outreach and a plan to maximize their District Manager's limited time, gaining community awareness and support. A program of community outreach began two years ago with the development of a District brochure, letterhead, and business card; materials that could explain the District's story. These materials were added and used to dress up reports and a schedule of limited presentations.

A plan developed by the then District Administrative Assistant with support, guidance, and trust from District Supervisors, lead to the development of a full schedule of community outreach events and a new job description for the Administrative Assistant making the position a District Manager, a title more closely describing his function. With these changes, the district was on course to reinvent itself, and not to look back.

It is the roll of the District Manager to be the active, day to day face of the North Side SWCD. It is his role to be active in the community while remaining in contact with District Supervisors. The District's core strength comes from a working partnership between the NRCS District Conservationist and staff, and the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission technical staff in the Jerome Field Office. This group, known as the partnership, has a strong working relationship.

District community events include: The "Jerome Environmental Roundtable" (a program to get locals talking and working together on community-wide conservation issues),

"Jerome Conservation Partnership" (a program developed to bring conservation related organizations and services in Jerome County together to serve the community), "Jerome Green Garden Contest" (an informational Program designed to bring best management practices to the home garden), Local-County-State presentations, and County and State participation. The District also has an extensive youth education program consisting of Free Arbor Day-Trees for elementary school children in the district, Arbor Day Tree Planting Event, Poster Contests, Envirothon sponsorship, and Natural Resources Camp sponsorships. The District Manager is an active part in the Envirothon program and part of the leadership team of the Natural Resources Camp.

The District Manager actively attends County Planning and Zoning Committee meetings, special projects with the County Commissioners ranging from Chapter 13 (manure management) to the General Plan and many water quality, and quantity meetings. The District Manager makes contact with members of the press on a regular basis to improve relationships. We work with our partners all year, not just when we need something.

During the last year the District Manager represented the District at Idaho Soil Conservation Commission Meetings (hosting one of their meetings, producing an agricultural tour and dinner), Legislative Interim Committee Meetings (hosting a committee meeting in Jerome), and spoke for the House Bill in Senate hearings. The District Manager represented the district at hearings held by the Idaho Department of Agriculture, leading to proposed manure storage regulations. The District even sponsored an open house for the USDA Service Center and invited producers and the general public.

Current District plans include employing a part-time Grant Specialist, to find financial assistance for existing and future district projects. The district needs to find a balance between existing funding and new funding sources to maintain itself and its present schedule of projects; as well as future projects, all while providing their Manager a reasonable wage and benefits. Community support for the District is strong. Some of the results from this community support program are:

- Over the last three years local funding for the district has gone from \$4,500.00 to \$20,000.00 with another increase expected.
- The District is now called upon to give conservation leadership to projects in the community.
- Three new projects have been assigned to the District by the County Commissioners with funding.

Every day presents a new opportunity for the North Side District.

Wood River Soil and Water Conservation District—Carl Pendleton, Chairman

The Wood River Soil Conservation District (SCD) celebrates over 25 years of promoting environmental enhancements to landowners throughout Southern Idaho. The District began their tree sale in the early 80's to help local producers establish windbreaks, shelterbelts and farmstead beautification. Other benefits also include wildlife habitat, energy savings and esthetic value.

In the past 25 years the District estimates over 200,000 trees have been planted in the area. One of the benefits from having the tree sale is that the District is able to keep their doors open to provide more information/education and public outreach.

"Initially we started the tree sale to address conservation needs" said Carl Pendleton, Chairman of the board. "Today we are not only selling conservation trees but we are creating a sense of environmental awareness."

"It's not easy to pull off a tree sale", says Barbara Astle, Administrative Assistant; District supervisors donate much of their time and equipment; the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) allows us to use their dock and parking lot facility during the week of the sale; Grady and Mary Garrett contribute their cold storage facilities to store trees throughout the sale, while the Shoshone High School allows students to participate in unloading and sorting trees.

This year's Tree Sale is Friday April 30th and Saturday May 1st. For more information on the Wood River SCD tree sale contact Barbara Astle at 208-886-2258 ext.3 or go to our website @ wrsxcd.org.



Camas Soil and Water Conservation District—Bill Davis, Chairman



The Camas Soil Conservation District (SCD), along with the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), is continuing with their annual data collection surveys. Using snowmobiles, supervisor Steve Miller travels to specific remote collection sites in Camas County and uses snow tubes to accurately gather statistics regarding snowpack, depth and moisture content.

The Camas SCD is also continuing a public well depth measurement study to measure water flow activity fluctuations on the Camas Prairie. This ongoing annual study has been conducted for 4 years. The collected measurements are compiled into a data base reflecting the variations and change in water flow and levels of the specific collection sites.

The SCD also has an active participation in the Manmade Community Park Project. This community effort project is working to develop a spent gravel extraction area outside the town site of Fairfield into a park and community outreach/activity area. Although the project is just in the beginning stages, it looks promising to become an attractive multi-use area for the community of Fairfield.